



Farming and Cancer: What are the Risks?¹

Nebraska Rural Health & Safety Coalition²

ARE FARMERS MORE LIKELY TO DEVELOP CANCER?

Overall, the risk cancer in farmers is lower than in the general population. This is probably explained by the fact that farmers as a group have healthier lifestyles than do many other people. However, certain cancers are increased in farmers, these include the following: lymphoma, leukemia, multiple myeloma, skin cancers, lip cancers, brain tumors, prostate cancer and stomach cancer.

WHAT ARE THE FARM-RELATED CAUSES OF THE INCREASED RISK FOR CERTAIN CANCERS?

There is now good evidence that heavy exposure to farm chemicals, such as the herbicide 2,4-D increases the risk of lymphoma and leukemia by up to 50%. Multiple myeloma may also be caused by this exposure. Nitrate contamination of ground water and organophosphate pesticide exposure may also be important.

The increased skin cancer risk is caused by sun exposure. Ultraviolet rays from the sun as well as other sources increase the risk of melanoma, basal cell and squamous cell carcinoma. Lip cancers are also caused by sun exposure.

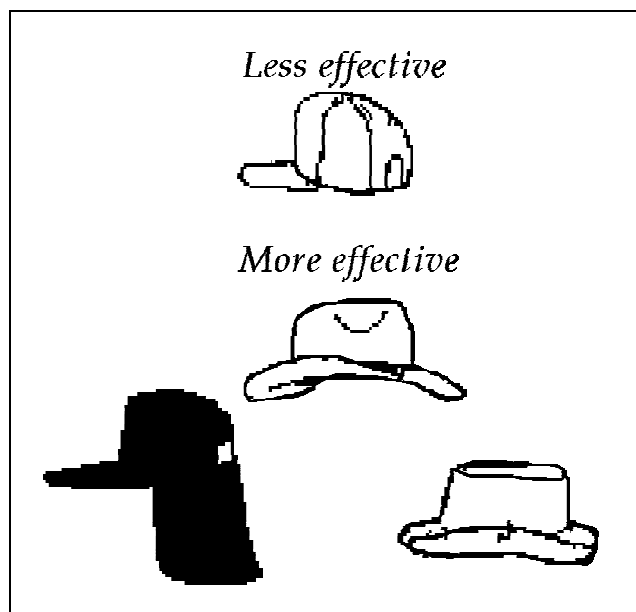
WHY DO SOME PEOPLE GET CANCERS SUCH AS THESE?

There are many different causes for cancers, including genetic or inherited risk. Environmental exposures to chemicals and radiation are thought to also play an important role in causing tumors. Factors such as diet contribute in ways which are not fully understood.

HOW CAN YOU PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY FROM CANCERS CAUSED BY WORK ON THE FARM?

You can decrease the risk for leukemia and lymphoma by using proper protection when mixing farm chemicals. Correct laundry of pesticide contaminated clothing is also important. Wearing sun screen with an SFP (sun protection factor) of at least 15 and hats that shade the ears, entire face and neck will reduce the risk for skin cancer (see drawings). These should be worn on cloudy as well as on sunny days. The sun's rays are strongest between 10 am and 4 pm.

IS FURTHER RESEARCH BEING DONE TO ANSWER THE REMAINING QUESTIONS ABOUT FARMING AND CANCER?



1. This document was produced by the Nebraska Rural Health and Safety Coalition. Funded in part by a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.
2. Nebraska Rural Health & Safety Coalition, University of Nebraska Medical Center, 600 South 42nd Street, Omaha, Nebraska 68198-5300. Phone: (402) 559-7397. FAX: (402) 559-8210.

Much remains to be learned about this topic. Research studies are being conducted by University of Nebraska Medical Center, the Nebraska Department of Health, the National Cancer Institute as well as by other institutions to further investigate all the cancers for which farmers are at greater risk. It is anticipated that a great deal of valuable information about these problems will be available in the next 10 years.

HOW CAN YOU FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THESE TOPICS?

In order to learn more about decreasing the risk of farm related illnesses contact the following:

- Your family physician
- Your county extension Educator
- Nebraska Department of Health (1-800-977-9997)
- American Cancer Society (1-800-642-8116)
- National Cancer Institute (1-800-4-CANCER)